

THE LOVE FEAST

Is It a Church Ordinance?

BY REV. JESSE HALL

Pastor, First Brethren Church
Spokane, Wash.

As we take up this subject, we pray that the Holy Spirit may guide and bless us together. We are aware that a subtle **peril** faces the student of the Scriptures whenever he undertakes the study of any Bible subject. There is the ever-present temptation to bring his own preconceived ideas to the Word, hoping for their confirmation.

Our first need, therefore, is to ascertain the **place** in the Scriptures where the subject under consideration is found, and then to be extremely cautious lest we be tempted to wrest it from the context in which it appears in order to fit it into our particular creed or practice. The portions noted for our study are found in Matthew 26:20ff., Mark 14:15ff., Luke 22:14ff., and John 13:1ff. In these portions there is reference made to a "supper," a full meal, that composed a part of a unique service presided over by our Lord Jesus Christ. At this service Jesus washed the disciples' feet and commanded them to perpetuate His example. He also took bread and a cup of the fruit of the vine, after supper, and gave it to the disciples, instructing them to see in these the symbols of His broken body and shed blood, to be perpetuated in remembrance of Him. The "supper" that formed the basis for the whole evening's activity is so closely integrated with these two symbolic acts it is self-evident the "supper" also shared in their very nature and purpose. For us to ignore this place

the "love feast" holds in its relation with and contribution to this memorable affair would put us dangerously close to doing just what Peter has so urgently warned against.

It is also important that we be careful to maintain a proper dispensational balance as we study the subject at hand. It is just as dangerous to ignore the dispensational setting of a verse of Scripture as it is to ignore the context in which a verse is found. The **period of time** in which this action takes place is of the utmost importance in determining its right to distinction as a church ordinance.

The Scriptures under consideration reveal that the actions of this memorable night took place at the close of Christ's public ministry. They also point out that this "supper" occurred one full day before Jesus was crucified on Calvary's tree. John 18:28 states that He died on the very day the Passover Lamb should be slain and eaten. That cross and the events surrounding it became the judgment period of the Dispensation of the Law. It brought to a swift close over 1,500 years of Jewish history in which the Passover feast held the central place. With the offering of His sinless body on the cross, the Passover feasts were done, the **picture** being supplanted by the **person**, who fulfilled it in every particular as He became "the lamb of God which taketh away

the sin of the world." So, on this memorable night, Jesus sees the shades of the old dispensation drawing slowly down. We find Him looking forward to a "new day," the day of God's grace with its portals almost ready to open "to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, to institute the ordinances for His church."

The picture revealed in this three-fold service given that night is of the utmost importance to His church since it sets forth symbolically the past, present, and future ministry of our Lord for His own. The "bread and the cup" becomes a symbol of His past ministry where His body was broken and His blood was shed to deliver from the penalty of sin, and speaks of our justification (Rom. 3:24-26). The "foot-washing" is a symbol of His present ministry at the throne of grace in which He undertakes the continued cleansing of His own from the defilement of sin, making possible their deliverance from its power and assuring a continued fellowship between the Lord and His people. It speaks symbolically of our sanctification (Eph. 5:26-27). But we look in vain for any sign of His future ministry in the activities of that blessed night if we treat the "supper" in that upper room as simply a common meal. In all fairness it must be considered in the light of its context and those things that surround it. The same sovereign decree that transformed the simple washing of feet and the bread and the cup into symbols full of spiritual meaning was operative throughout the entire evening and included the "supper" that formed the setting for them both. Jesus did not institute one ordinance and then sit down and eat a meal that could have no symbolic meaning or relation to the rest of the evening's activity, and then, at the close, return to the task of instituting another ordinance for

His church. No; the picture is one, for in this supper we have a symbol of the future ministry of our Lord for His own when they are gathered at the marriage supper of the Lamb and they share with Him in the glory of His Father (John 17:24).

If this were just an ordinary meal eaten in an ordinary manner there would be no reason for treating it otherwise, but if Jesus Christ first, and the apostles after Him, taught the churches to see in the "love feast" a spiritual significance, then we have good reason to believe that the feast ought to be continued as we celebrate the holy communion in order to teach and perpetuate the truth that is back of it. The Love Feast was instituted and designed by our Lord to portray the fellowship that should exist in the family of God, and the love without which we are nothing. And more, it carries our minds forward to the time when He shall come again, and all nations of them that are saved, shall sit down with Him and "eat bread in the kingdom of God" (Luke 14:15). It speaks symbolically of our glorification (Col. 3:4).

The practice of the early church is in complete accord with this viewpoint. (See I Cor. 5:7-8; 11:17-30; Jude 12.) Paul, Peter, and Jude all write concerning the abuses connected with the observance of the Love Feast, but in no instance is this service abrogated or its practice officially discontinued because such abuse existed.

Church historians tell us that the communion was celebrated at the close of public feasts of love at which Christians met to realize their fellowship with one another, and to partake together, rich and poor, masters and slaves, on equal terms, of a common meal. The spiritual fellowship and love in these meetings was so dominant that the pagans taking notice of them cried out: "Behold, how these Christians love one another."

January 17, 1959

The Brethren Missionary Herald